



## **SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE**

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July 23, 2019

Chairman Ajit Pai  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street SW,  
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai,

I pen these thoughts in response to the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) Public Notice which considers changes to the Universal Service Fund (USF) programs, including E-Rate. In offering my thoughts, I share that past FCC support for E-Rate funding was crucial to the students, staff and Farmington, New Mexico community. Importantly, the E-Rate program provided critical discounts that assisted the Farmington Municipal Schools' efforts to secure affordable telecommunications and internet rates.

As a brief introduction to our school system, Farmington Municipal Schools is located in the upper northwest corner of New Mexico in an area known as the Four Corners. Not surprising for New Mexico, Farmington is considered rural and remote, which helps to explain the more than 78 percent of students identified as Economically Disadvantaged. As such, access to affordable infrastructure within the district and connectivity to the rest of the world is important to our students and staff. With a student population of over 11,600 consisting of equal numbers of Caucasian, Hispanic and American Indian, Farmington is rated as the most diverse school district in New Mexico and the 174<sup>th</sup> of 11,851 school systems in America.

For Farmington, E-Rate programs are critical to our students' academic success. As an example of the importance of connecting to the rest of the world, Farmington students and staff are able to access online courses and conduct classroom research. And importantly, through high speed internet access, participate in New Mexico's online annual assessment of student progress. Simply stated, the power of E-Rate drives the educational futures of our students. It creates opportunity for career and college readiness by allowing our students and staff to expand learning beyond our school district and state's borders. Any effort by the FCC to restrict E-Rate funding by imposing a cap on funding, compromises the future of our students. Rather than limiting funds, the FCC should be using every effort possible to invest in the future of our youth.

Worse yet is the not so subtle threat of creating competition for funding between public schools, public libraries and rural health care providers. It is my belief that the FCC, by setting a cap for E-Rate funding, has chosen to deliberately reduce opportunity for high-speed broadband service, and in doing so, has deliberately chosen to isolate the rural and poor from the rest of the country. Make no mistake, the proposed massive overhaul of E-Rate programs, will have a devastating impact to our nation's future.

In closing, I ask that you and the Federal Communications Commission stand strong for schools, libraries, and rural health care providers by opposing the proposed cap on E-Rate funding. Our nation's children are better served by your efforts to continue to support and expand on the E-Rate program that opens the door to the rest of the world.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Eugene J. Schmidt", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Eugene J. Schmidt, Ph.D.  
Superintendent  
Farmington Municipal Schools

cc: Noelle Ellerson Ng – Associate Executive Director AASA